

WORSHIP AND RELIGION – GANGAPRASAD UPADYAYA

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‘WORSHIP’ is too well known a word to need definition. At least at this stage it will not be advisable to embarrass the reader with the logical complexities of art of defining. Suffice to say that every sane man knows what worship is.

Worship is an important department of religion. Some persons go even so far as to hold that religion is worship and worship is religion. The secular and therefore the commonest view is that whatever does not directly pretend to worship is beyond the pale of religion. But even those who think that religion is co-extensive with life acknowledge the importance of worship. If you examine closely the religious life of any people, you will find there a good deal about worship. A man, who does not worship at all, is not religious at all.

For being religious it is not necessary to believe in God. This sounds paradoxical. But there are religions existing in the world which do not profess to have a belief in God. Those who have devoted some time to the classification of religions have discovered at least two religions which boldly and openly repudiate theism in all its forms. They are Buddhism and Jainism. Some researchers have tried to prove that Buddhist and Jains are also theist; at least their scriptures prove so. It may be, we are not concerned here what the Jains or the Buddhist ought to believe consistently with their scriptures and traditions. We mean to say that the best Jains and the best Buddhist claims that they in no such creature or Governor of the universe as other religionist call God. Thus there are two kinds of religions, theistic and non-theistic but one thing is common to both these classes and that is worship. The Jains do worship, so do the Buddhist. Who do they worship if they do not believe in God? That is the question which it is not our concern to answer not even to analyze at this stage. We know that the Jains worship and do so without believing in God and the Buddhist have the same claim. It is only the atheist that do not worship thus atheism is not contradictory to theism, but to religion. The non-theism of the Jains and the Buddhist is not identical with atheism or even agnosticism. Whether you believe in God or not, you are religious as long as you worship.

Religion makes a man look to something beyond his death, something beyond the everyday routine of life-eating, drinking, sleeping etc. there is something mysterious about religion. Similarly there is something mysterious about ‘worship’ too. every form of worship has two sides, one External or Visible and the other Internal and therefore inexplicable and the latter is more important. For instance a Worshiper bows his head at the altar God. He puts some offerings before the image. These are common actions. But what makes the whole process worship is not the physical act of bending the head or putting libations at a particular place. The real thing is something mysterious which even the worshiper is unable to analyze or explain. A Hindu passer-by passes by a temple and as soon as he comes face to face the building, he folds his hands or bows his head a little and then goes on. If you catechize him on the point he will smile and be silent. He does not know what he has done, why he has done or what fruit the action will bring him. Possibly he may not know what particular deity that temple holds. But he knows that it is worship. It is something inexplicable. Something awful and mysterious that he feels. This is worship. When a Jain is performing his worship in his temple, he is not worshiping God. He believes in no God but still he is worshiping something which he can partly explain and partly not. One thing is common there. The mysterious awfulness that fills the heart of a monotheist when he has no image before him, or an idolater when he bows his head before an image, is also present in the mind of a Buddhist or Jain who is non-believer in the existence of an intelligent purposeful creator of the Universe. This awfulness is the main factor of worship, and the most determining factor in the form of worship. This is the common standpoint of all worshipers and can be a safe starting point for all deliberations on the subject of worship.

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